

by Jamie Hecker



Jamie Hecker has been a lifelong fan of Disney, and is passing on his love to his sons. He and his family visit Orlando annually and always look forward to their next trip. When not in Orlando, he resides in northern Virginia with his beautiful wife Suzanne, two boys and four cats. You can read more about his "hidden Disney" musings at myhiddendisney.blogspot.com/

Paul Frees

In the Disney family there are countless Legends whose faces may be unknown, but they are renowned for their timeless work. Animators create cinematic masterpieces, and Imagineers fabricate fantastical attractions that can, quite literally, whisk us away to Neverland. Voice artists play an equally important role in the Disney experience, adding a critical sonic layer to films, animated shorts, and Disney park attractions. In this regard, the collective works of Paul Frees shine brightly. His silky baritone has graced the silver screen, the television set, and classic attractions at both Disneyland and Walt Disney World.

Paul Frees was born in Chicago on June 22, 1920, and raised in a pre-television era where radio was king. He began an early career in this medium, and his versatility and knack for capturing style, nuance, and pitch with his voice allowed him to filter to the top of radio stars. His career in radio began in 1942, but was briefly interrupted when he was drafted into the United States Army. He was injured while serving his country at Normandy on D-Day and returned home to recuperate. Under the GI Bill, he briefly enrolled at the Chouinard Art Institute (which later morphed into the California Institute of the Arts at the direction of Walt and Roy Disney), but eventually dropped out. He remained in the Los Angeles area, continuing his work in radio on several noted serials and eventually into film. As a measure of his value to the industry, he was often tasked with recreating the voice work of others when necessary during film post-production. For example, Frees dubbed for Japanese actor Toshiro Mifune when he appeared in English language films. Said Mifune, "Paul sounds more like me than I do."

Frees' chameleon-like voice and his instinct to capture the spirit and heart of a character led to his wide appearances on animation serials and specials through the 60s and 70s. He was a regular performer for animator Jay Ward, including notable performances as Boris Badenov, the nemesis on the *Rocky and Bullwinkle Show*, and Inspector Fenwick from *Dudley Do-Right*. He was also featured prominently in Rankin/Bass Productions, a studio that created stop-motion seasonal specials such as *Santa Claus is Comin' to Town*, *Frosty the Snowman*, and *Frosty's Winter Wonderland*. Fans of these specials will recall his work as the Burgermeister Meisterburger, Santa Claus, and Jack Frost, respectively. His golden intonations weren't limited to television programs, as he also lent his voice to several advertisements. In this regard, he is famous for his performances as Toucan Sam for Froot Loops and Poppin' Fresh, the Pillsbury Doughboy.

Frees was in high demand in Hollywood where he provided voice work for numerous studios, which naturally included The Walt Disney Company. He started his Disney career by narrating various episodes of Disney's television programs such as *Man In Space*. He also narrated the 1959 comedy *Shaggy Dog*, and even made a rare on-screen cameo in the film as Dr. J. W. Galvin. A discussion of Disney history would not be complete without covering animation, and here Frees has a prominent entry. He provided the eccentric and entertaining voice and persona of Professor Ludwig Von Drake, a highly educated European mallard and uncle to Donald Duck. Frees brought Von Drake to life in eighteen Disney television specials, beginning in *An Adventure In Color* on the premiere episode of *Walt Disney's Wonderful World of Color*.

The Disney theme park experience is full of sights and sounds that stay with

Guests long after the vacation is over, and here again Paul Frees' contributions are vast and memorable at Disneyland, Walt Disney World and even Disney's attractions at the 1964/65 New York World's Fair. Walt Disney's precursor to Imagineering was WED, and it created several state-of-the-art attractions for the Fair, including Great Moments with Mr. Lincoln for the state of Illinois pavilion. The show featured a never-before seen Audio-Animatronic figure of President Lincoln. Paul Frees provided the somber narration and introduction to the show. His same role was also featured at Disneyland when Great Moments with Mr. Lincoln premiered there in 1965. Frees' presidential credits don't end with Lincoln, however. When Walt Disney World opened

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These accomplishments alone are enough for an impressive Disney career. But Frees has two other contributions to the Disney parks that elevate his stature tenfold. The first is with the Pirates of the Caribbean, the swashbuckling spectacular that debuted in Anaheim in 1967 and Orlando

in 1973. Frees voices the mysterious, unseen pirate that intones "dead men tell no tales" as Guests begin their journey. Few of the scalawags have names, save for the recent addition of Jack Sparrow, but all Disney fans know who the auctioneer is. Frees brings this rogue to life as he barks out, "I'm not spongin' for rum. It be gold I'm after!" The Haunted Mansion is the other classic Disney E-ticket attraction that prominently features Frees. As Guests enter the stretching room en route to the Doom Buggies, they are greeted by the Ghost



in 1971, one of its signature attractions was the Hall of Presidents, featuring the likeness of every Commander-in-Chief and updated accordingly. The original program that ran from 1971 through 1993 featured a stirring film highlighting critical moments in American history as a precursor to the appearance of the presidents themselves. Frees showed his versatility in this film, taking on the vocal roles of George Washington, Stephen Douglas, and colonial era Pennsylvania Governor Thomas Mifflin. He also provided additional ancillary voices in the film.

Disney theme parks are constantly in a state of growth and change. As Walt said, "Disneyland will never be com-

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Paul Frees remained active in Hollywood until 1986, when he passed away at the age of 66. For his contributions to the Walt Disney Company, he was posthumously named a Disney Legend in 2006. 